“They’re my two favourites” versus “the bigger scheme of things”: Pro-Am historians remember Australian television

Alan McKee with Chris Keating

Abstract

This chapter reports on eleven interviews with Pro-Am archivists of Australian television which aimed to find out how they decide what materials are important enough to archive. Interviewees mostly choose to collect materials in which they have a personal interest. But they are also aware of the relationship between their own favourites and wider accounts of Australian television history, and negotiate between these two positions. Most interviewees acknowledged Australian television’s links with British and American programming, but also felt that Australian television is distinctive. They argued that Australian television history is ignored in a way that isn’t true for the UK or the US. Several also argued that Australian television has had a ‘naïve’ nature that has allowed it to be more experimental.

Introduction

This chapter is about Pro-Am Australian television historians, and how they remember Australian TV. Pro-Ams, as defined by Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller, are: ‘innovative, committed and networked amateurs working to professional standards’ (Leadbeater and Miller 2004, 9). Many Australian television viewers have taken their passion for the medium and its history to another level, collecting copies of old television programs, memorabilia, listings magazines and other sources of information about programs, commercials and station idents. We interviewed eleven of these Pro-Am archivists in order to find out what they collect, how they collect it, and how they think their individual work fits into the larger history of Australian television.

This work is part of the nationally funded reseaarch project ‘Australian television and popular memory: new approaches to the cultural history of the media in the project of nation-building’. This aims to:

> construct histories of Australian television from the point of view of those who have made and consume it, in order to describe and understand the part that television has played in the popular experience of a national culture

One of the groups who ‘consume’ Australian television are the Pro-Am collectors. These archivists, we argue, play an important part in the preservation of Australian television history. But it is not uncontroversial. The increasing visibility of amateur archives (through online sources such as YouTube) has led to ferocious debate about the difference between professional and amateur archiving practices, and the relative value of each. For some authors, Pro-Am archivists are a threat. Their archives ‘undermine fundamentals of academic inquiry … structures of order and discipline’ (Juhasz 2009, 149). They do not create archives ‘in the proper sense of the word’ (Hilderbrand 2007, 54). There are concerns about the permanence of amateur collections (Prelinger 2007, 114; Hilderbrand 2007, 48), or the ways in which they are indexed (Prelinger 2007, 116; Wallace and Van Fleet 2005, 102). Some researchers talk about ‘frustration and disbelief’ that canonical material is missing from Pro-Am collections (Hilderbrand 2007, 50), or note that in the collection practices of Pro-Ams, ‘a bias is evident’ (Royal and Kapila 2009, 146) (as if that were not the case in more formal collections).

On the other hand, some commentators note that Pro-Am collections can have their own ‘epistemic virtues’ (Fallis 2008, 1668; Hilderbrand 2007, 47). Pro-Am archives are often home to different kinds of material from formal collections (Hilderbrand 2007, 50). And while popular histories have been dismissed by some professional historians for focusing on what they see as ‘trivial’ aspects of history (Rosenzweig 2006, 141), as other researchers note questions about what historical artefacts are important enough to be archived are ‘problematic’ and ‘subjective’ (Lloyd 2007, 55):

> One may summarize the central tenet of preservation most simply in the following statement; we preserve what is of value. Yet, who determines the value of cultural objects … [V]alue is entirely a construct … it is often the case that one type of value is foregrounded on the basis of the judgment of one

> particular set of experts or authorities … Often it is stakeholders with power that establish value … (Gracy 2007, 188)

Archives always tell partial histories of nations. Some people's stories are told, others are excluded (Hogan 2008). Pro-Am collectors of Australian television history contribute an archive that is different from official collections, but just as interesting – and can be, in relation to some genres, more complete. Often the material that Pro-Am historians collect has been unfairly ignored by formal collections because of cultural prejudice. In a comparison of YouTube with the National Film and Sound Archive to see how they represented the history of Australian television, McKee notes that the NFSA is:

> stronger on current affairs and older programs… [but weaker than Pro-Am archives on] the popular history of Australian television – game shows, lifestyle genres, moments of human interest, 'great moments' of television programs and content that matches with the way that programs are recollected in popular memory (McKee 2011)

This chapter is based on detailed interviews with eleven Pro-Am archivists of Australian television – these include co-author Chris Keating as well as Andrew Bayley, Nigel Giles, Milton Hammon, Garry Hardman, Andrew Mercado, Troy Walters and four who wished to remain anonymous. All were Pro-Am in the sense that they perform curatorial work on an unpaid basis for their own interest – although several of them have also managed to make some money from their work (including Mercado, who uses some of it in a successful TV career). Alan McKee interviewed all eleven of these Pro-Am collectors. They were asked about what they collect, why they collect it, and how they see their collections fitting into a more general history of Australian television. The interview transcriptions were subject to 'interview textual analysis', in the course of which we:

> did not take a naïve realist approach to this data: [we] did not attempt to measure the 'authenticity' or 'truth' of the speaking positions. On the other hand, [we] did not want to look for hidden deep meanings of which the interviewees themselves would be unaware. Rather [we] treated the interview data as a text to be subjected to poststructural textual analysis, making an

> educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text (McKee 2004, 205)

The chapter presents the voices of these Pro-Am historians explaining in detail the version of Australian television history that they remember.

'I was a weird child'

As Gracy notes: 'One may summarize the central tenet of preservation most simply in the following statement; we preserve what is of value. Yet, who determines the value of cultural objects?' (Gracy 2007, 188). The question of how to decide what is important enough to collect is a key issue in current debates about archiving practice. Traditionally archivists have favoured middle-class 'quality' culture. It was only in the 1980s that it become common for museums in Western cultures to allow collections of popular culture to be exhibited (Pearce 1992, 113), and this is still often seen as 'exceptional':

> A significant shift in purpose for museums is still therefore required if popular culture is to be taken seriously as a topic in its own right, and not merely a few exceptional aspects included in the museum if their artistic or historical significance can be 'authenticated' (Moore 1997, 4)

The question of how Pro-Ams decide what is worth preserving is therefore of key importance.

One discourse that emerged in some interviews was a refusal to make such decisions. As one Pro-Am archivist expressed this:

> I guess it's just that I see it as people's work, so people have been creative and created work and have put energy into creating something, and then it has just been forgotten … I think it's all important (Anon)

But while we may agree with such a sentiment, it is not a useful guide to the everyday practice of curating. Nobody – not even a national archive, and certainly not any individual 'amateur' collection – can preserve everything that is broadcast on television, along with related memorabilia and paperwork. So alongside this general commitment to the value of all television, Pro-Am collectors employed a number of discourses to decide in practice what to keep. So as Troy Walters puts it: 'pretty much

everything has its importance in my opinion … but personally my area of interest in collecting is pre-1990s'. These collectors balanced a commitment to the general value of all television with a commitment to collecting those aspects of it that they personally have an interest in. As one Pro-Am collector describes the curating process: 'I like gathering it, and then having a look and seeing if any of it interests me. And if it does I keep it'. Nigel Giles notes how his purchasing decisions are informed by his own passions:

> I went to a school fete market up here at St Kilda primary [school] last year and there was a *Hey, Hey It's Saturday!* game. And the friend I was with just said, Hey look, are you interested in that? And I said, yes, no, and I didn't end up buying it … it was affordable, ten bucks or something … My main interest is *Number 96*, *Prisoner*, I love that as well. So I'll gladly add anything of that genre to my collection. But I'm not so fanatical about it that I have to … cover every aspect of Australian television from 1956 to 1990

It's notable that an interest in archiving all television history is here dismissed as being 'fanatical'. There is clearly, for Pro-Am archivists, an important personal investment in the items that they choose to collect. For several of them the material that they now archive is what they fell in love with as children. For some it is particular programs, for other genres. And so Giles, for example, notes that:

> When I was far too young to be watching [drama serial] *Number 96* I was watching it five nights a week, and I loved it … probably about eight years old … [and then] where I grew up in Victoria, in the outer East [of Melbourne]… there was a Croydon flea market every Sunday … there was someone offloading a load of second hand books, and I found a book there called 'Marriage of Convenience', and it was a *Number 96* tie-in book … because I loved *Number 96* I got hold of this book and couldn't wait to devour it. It was based on a storyline from the series. The series started in 1972, and I didn't start watching until 1974, so reading this paperback, oh, wow, I can fill in the episodes I've missed out on and heard bits and pieces about

Indeed, it was interesting to see that several of the Pro-Am archivists couldn't say when they had started collecting. It was a childhood practice that had never stopped.

As one puts it: ‘I’ve *always* been collecting! … I just started collecting things here and there until it started to get a bit out of hand!’. Andrew Mercado notes that:

> I mean every kid sort of has a hobby … For some reason, I was always completely fascinated by movies and television, and at that stage I was collecting stuff and putting them in scrapbooks

Giles also has scrapbooks and ‘I used to get *TV Week* and *TV Times*, and I used to cut out mainly *Number 96* stuff’. In Bayley’s case:

> I’d always read the TV magazines and things like that. My grandmother used to always buy them and give them to me, so I always just used to read them, and occasionally I’d keep a few

In his case, he notes ‘As I got older though I sort of just started collecting them’. This seamless move from being a kid obsessed with sticking things into scrapbooks into being a collector comes through many in many of the interviews. One remembers that he started collecting ‘as a kid’, and notes that ‘I was a weird child’. It was clear in some interviews that the passion for collection functions as an identity – it was never simply going to be a job. Only one of the interviewees began collecting later in life, and even here there was a strong personal emotional investment in the practice. Garry Hardman worked at television production company Crawford Productions for many years early in his career, and had powerful fond memories of the company. So when he got Internet access, ‘I felt, well … I should develop a website dedicated to one of the happiest times in my life, which is working at Crawfords’:

Most of the interviewees made no money from their archival work, and only one (Mercado) has managed to turn it into a way to make a sustainable living. Indeed, one of the definitional elements of the Pro-Am archivists is that they don’t do their work for money. As Chris Keating puts it:

> I mean, conservatively in the 20 years I have been collecting I have probably spent close to $40,000, $50,000 on the *TV Weeks* and *TV Times* … Over a long term putting them all in dribs and drabs, you know, 10 or 20 at a time on eBay, I will probably get half, maybe three-quarters or maybe more … But no, there’s no real hope of making any sort of windfall out of it, even making any sort of income out of it is just – in my experience over the last 20 years, not possible

This point was also made by Milton Hammon, Bayley and Giles. Given that they are not being paid for this work, it is only to be expected that the Pro-Am collectors would tend to collect material that personally fascinates them.

This raises an interesting point – does *anybody* who works in archiving do it simply for the money? Or would we expect that even those professional archivists and researchers who are paid for their work will still tend to specialise in those areas of culture which personally fascinate them? That is a topic for a separate research project – but one where listening to the voices of the Pro-Am collectors raises fascinating questions.

'for me personally one of the great moments of Australian television …'

If collectors only collected what they personally liked, with no interest in or awareness of wider Australian television history, the practice could easily be defined as solipsistic. However, it was clear that all of the Pro-Am archivists could place their own collections within a wider history of Australian television. In the interviews I asked the collectors for their thoughts on what constituted 'great moments' in Australian television history. In their answers it was clear that they were negotiating between two different discourses – their own personal passions, and their awareness of a larger picture of Australian television history. Giles navigates carefully between his own personal 'favourites' and 'the bigger scheme of things':

> *Number 96* and *Prisoner* … they're my two favourites. I loved *Sons and Daughters*. Mainly because of the cast, I guess. But yes, there are other shows that are important. I think that *Skippy* is important, in the scheme of things. I think things like Countdown … some things are more important than others if they're groundbreaking. Things that I've seen of Graham Kennedy … I wasn't born when he was doing *IMT*, but I've since seen some of his *IMT* stuff on DVD and what he was doing was groundbreaking. He just had a completely different way of doing things to other people. A different way of using the medium, I guess. So I think he's important. I think Bert Newton's important. I love Bert and Patti. I'm obsessed with the Newtons[1]. … I love Australian television from what I watched as a kid … I don't know about in the bigger scheme of things

This tension between personal interest and the 'bigger scheme of things' was evident in several of the interviews. One Pro-Am archivist explained that the bigger picture played an important part in his curating practices:

> personally there's things that I regard as more valuable to myself because it interests me, an example of that would be the stuff from the regional stations – which I grew up with. But generally while I'm preserving things I've got to think 'well what would be interesting to other people?' in a general sense … I mean what interests me and what interests someone else are two completely different questions… You know, personally I don't like football, but there is a great cross-section of Australia that does, so therefore they would place more interest on football than maybe I would personally

When I asked Hammon what he thought were important moments in Australian television history, he stopped and asked 'Television full stop, or just music ones? [his own personal interest]'. He was aware of the different discourses, and it was only when I specified that I was interested in what he personally thought of as important moments in Australian television history that he gave an account of the importance of music programs.

We can see then two discourses of value at work in the comments of the Pro-Am collectors – a personal one (my favourites) versus a social or institutional one (the bigger scheme of things). Two of the interviewees suggested that the fact they pay attention to these two discourses of value marks a key difference between Pro-Am collectors and the general population, with the latter tending to work more purely on nostalgia. Mercado runs a website where he posts material about Australian television, as well as the entertainment industries more generally, and he notes that:

> there is certainly still a huge market for nostalgia that I've discovered on the website that I run. Quite often the biggest response I get from people is when I do something from twenty or thirty years ago that really kind of triggers a response and it will be because maybe I found an image from one of these books that hasn't been seen for many, many years and it stirs up interest

Similarly, one interviewee notes that when he is approached through his website by members of the public, it is often:

> someone in their late 30s or 40s or something, or someone with a birthday coming up and they would like a particular episode of *Romper Room* that they were in or sometimes other kids' game shows that they were in

By contrast, the Pro-Am collectors – as noted above – negotiated between this personal nostalgia and a more objective interest in old material. Keating notes that:

> I really get excited when I come across something I remember from my childhood. I found a clip on YouTube last week for the Archie and Sabrina cartoon show, which I remembered vividly from when I was a child, and no one else remembered it. I actually searched for it, and finally saw it put up on YouTube. It was precisely the way I remembered it from when I was like seven years old, even down to the fonts they were using on screen, and just fabulous, marvellous; I love that sort of stuff. But the fact that I don't necessarily remember something from my childhood or if it's from before I was born, it doesn't matter if would I be interested in it. I may even be interested in it more

Similarly, a young (twenty four year old) Pro-Am collector says that:

> I have a whole shelf of stuff set aside from the 1980s – for some reason I enjoy that, because it seems so far-removed for me. It's interesting because it seems like it was such a long time ago for me

For these Pro-Am collectors it was possible to negotiate between their personal interest in particular kinds of television, and a sense that there was indeed a 'bigger scheme of things' that needs to be taken into account in writing the history of the medium.

'I don't think anyone else ever seems to remember it, but to me that was a very iconic moment'

The Pro-Am historians were happy to produce detailed accounts of important moments in Australian television history that were informed to various degrees by their own personal interests. As noted above, Hammon's account of Australian television history, when he was invited to talk about what was important to him, centred on music television:

> For me, it's mainly music. You look at Brian Henderson's *Bandstand*, which went for a long time. In Melbourne there's *Your Hit Parade*, which was a rip off of an American show … we'd have people miming to the top eight songs, I love it, John Darcy, an actor, miming away as Elvis. It was when Johnny O'Keefe with his vibe came on and did his shows for the ABC and Seven, *The Johnny O'Keefe Show* [and] *Six O'Clock Rock*… [and then] *Teen Scene,… The Go Show* … all those shows, just fantastic … I grew up on *Uptight* and *Happening*. Born in '53, it was when I was fourteen, fifteen, I really started getting into music … my younger sister … she was nearly ten, but she was so much about the Beatles coming out, drove me crazy. But you couldn't help it, it was infectious

The interviewees were asked to talk about 'iconic' moments in Australian history. One responded with a history centred on the soap operas that are his passion:

> I would say that some of the serials that I've done or written about on the website, they have more iconic moments than most other shows do. I think they're a bit more bold. For example the pantyhose murderer from *Number 96*, that's on DVD and I mean you just watch them and that's the most riveting thirty two episodes of anything I've ever seen almost, and they also had the bomb, I think they were effective storylines … I know *Prisoner* had a lot, they had a fire, a tunnel escape, a quarantine drama, which turned out to be a poisoning – they thought it was a tropical disease but it was someone poisoning everyone. They had the terrorists' siege which was pretty violent.

This Pro-Am historian presents a detailed knowledge of the storylines of both the more familiar television programs and those that are less well known:

> *E Street* had a number of them; they had a car bomb, they had 'Mr. Bad' which was the serial killer. I mean even ones that I would consider minor and very forgotten shows like *The Restless Years* … [it] had a serial killer storyline, and you didn't know who it was and it turned out to be a female character who was blind and in a wheelchair! I thought that was a pretty iconic storyline … I mean it just goes on and on when I think about it. *The Box*, for example … tried to be a bit 'iconic', but being made by Crawfords I think they held back – I don't think they wanted to be seen as being too out there; but they had a fire, and they

> had a nudist retreat episode, which was sort of publicized as having lots of full frontal nudity, which it did have, but sadly no-one seemed to care, but they were trying. The first episode of *The Box*, is absolutely riveting, it's almost like an *All About Eve* in terms of plot twists and characters, and drama. That's an iconic episode on its own – just the opening episode of *The Box*

When talking about *The Restless Years* serial killer storyline this collector notes that 'I don't think anyone else ever seems to remember it, but to me that was a very iconic moment'. This is an interesting insight into the complexity of reconciling a personal interest with a sense of the broader picture. Clearly this Pro-Am archivist is giving a wonderful overview of the important moments in soap operas, from the point of view of a viewer of that genre. But how does this fit into 'the bigger picture'? Giles talks about the importance of *Number 96*, balancing his passion with an objective claim for its importance:

> I can harp on about *Number 96* all night … that was such a groundbreaking show, and it was doing stuff that nobody else was doing, in terms of television, anywhere else in the world. We did it here in this country, and it was hugely popular and it was groundbreaking. And the cast of that show were megastars. … [that] was almost 40 years ago, and they were doing things then that they don't do now – interracial things, gay issues, all sorts of stuff, nudity … And the impact that that show had, well part of me collecting is keeping that alive somehow

Other interviewees present accounts of Australian television history that are less clearly linked to their own personal interests. When Chris Keating is asked what important moments of Australian television have been lost, he ranges across the history of the medium:

> for starters, the opening night … TCN-9 doesn't have genuine footage of its actual opening … HSV-7 Melbourne hasn't got footage of its own opening night … there is so many things that they have lost – first television appearances by people like Graham Kennedy, Bert Newton, Tony Barber, Johnny O'Keefe, you name them, Olivia Newton-John … Early tests of TV, which go back to 1929 – the first people to appear on TV in Australia appeared in 1929 in Melbourne. There's no footage of those … Graham Kennedy's crow call would

> be right up there. … Graham Kennedy's speech against Senator Douglas McClelland in 1975 … Mary Hardy dropping the magic 'F' on air a couple of times in 1973 … That sort of stuff you would like to keep. The first outside broadcasts, major sporting events, anything of that nature

Bayley's account of iconic moments is similarly wide ranging:

> there's some significant programs, like the old *In Melbourne Tonight* and *The Mavis Bramston Show* which I think was quite groundbreaking in its presentation of comedy in those days. And then sort of go on to the 1970s and there's things like *Number 96* which was very significant sort of presenting suburban kind of stories in a more realistic kind of nature. Also the cop shows were pretty significant, and events. Obvious things like the moon-landing, even though it wasn't in Australia, the advent of SBS, which took on a whole new perspective on television here, whereas before everything was basically American with a bit of Australian, and a bit of English, but it sort of showed that there's a lot of TV out there that comes from other cultures. I think that was fairly iconic in its formation as well

Mercado's response to a question on 'the iconic moments in Australian TV history' is exhaustive:

> Iconic moments would be Graham Kennedy in the early days of TV and his original variety show *In Melbourne Tonight*, which was a huge success … when the two workmen, technicians in the Snowy Mountains, they have just connected this coaxial cable between Sydney and Melbourne and they connect the cable and they sit there watching a broadcast of Graham Kennedy from the Melbourne studio. And pretty soon then you have this moment that we see a lot on the '50 Years of TV' specials where Don Lane in Sydney and Graham Kennedy in Melbourne are doing a simultaneous song-and-dance act on a split screen because that cable has been tied up – that's a great moment for me.

In Melbourne Tonight was the first big hit on Australian television, and provides a common starting point in many histories of the medium (McKee 2001).

> *Homicide* is our first big successful drama where we make a police show. It starts in 1967 and it's soon the most watched show on Australian TV and proves to Australian TV networks that Australians will watch homemade dramas. And

> so then the next thing, you know, Crawford Productions are making a police show for Channel 9 called *Division 4* and a police show for Channel 0 called *Matlock Police*.

Mercado also talks about *Number 96*, an important touchpoint for many of the Pro-Am historians:

> *Number 96* of course is the most iconic one for me. It is just seismic, what it does to the television landscape in 1972. Not only does it put all these previously taboo subjects on TV like the nudity, the homosexuality, rape within marriage, all of these subjects that have never been on TV before, but it does it five nights a week at 8:30 pm, and by doing that creates the first ever five night a week prime time serial … After that I guess *Prisoner* is a pretty iconic moment because *Prisoner* is a show that's a pretty hard-hitting subject but it's an all female cast, and to this day it seems we've never had a show that's ever highlighted women the way that *Prisoner* did for six years. So those are my most iconic moments in Australian TV.

In all of these comments we can see the Pro-Am collectors negotiating between discourses of personal interest and discourses of 'the bigger picture'. Each of them is thinking about how their own passions interact with the interests of other histories of Australian television – although the interviews they did not make explicit exactly where they gathered their information about 'the bigger picture', beyond references to the interests of other 'cross-section[s] of the Australian population'.

This honesty about personal investment in the curation of history is notable. The ways that the Pro-Am collectors think about the relationship between their own passions and the needs of a wider community can provide a useful model for all archivists who want to think about their own practice, and the importance of their own personal tastes in their work.

'because nothing else had been written about them'

Even as they are drawn to different areas of Australian television history by their personal histories and passions, the Pro-Am collectors are linked by a number of common discourses. One of these is a discourse of *supplementarity*: that they have to collect a particular kind of material because nobody – and particularly, no

professionals – are doing so. For one interviewee this meant paying attention to a genre that had not received much attention: 'I sort of chose the genre of 'the soap opera', mainly because nothing else had been written about them as far as I could tell'. Interestingly, this interviewee says that it was the 'disposable' nature of soap operas that drew his interest:

> I thought I'll write down the storylines [from *Prisoner*] and my thoughts on it and how the series progressed just so that it wouldn't be forgotten because at the time things like that were never really recorded or written down anywhere and the information sort of seemed disposable …

Many of the Pro-Am archivists are driven to collect material that has traditionally not bee the focus of collections such as the National Film and Sound Archive (McKee 2011). In particularly, commercials and station idents are popular elements of their collections. Bayley notes that:

> I was never really one to keep the programs, I was often more interested in the stuff that appeared between the programs. Even as a kid I'd apparently watch the commercials more than I'd watch the show … I've never really collected the programs as such but mostly just the other bits and pieces

Walters has 'a lot of great … commercials, station logos … It's the artisticness of them … I find the old commercials very wacky'. Keating notes that it's 'the TV commercials, especially the ones I remember from when I was kid – that's where the childhood thing really kicks in with the commercials. Not so much with the programmes.' Another interviewee explained the appeal of idents in terms of local identity and regionalism: 'they would spend a minute or even a couple of minutes promoting the station, but there was that local element that you just don't get today'.

Other collectors are particularly interested in merchandise and memorabilia rather than programs. This version of Australian television history is, again, underrepresented in official archives such as the National Film and Sound Archive (McKee 2011). Bayley's interest is:

> books, magazines, and a little bit of just bumper stickers and other bits and pieces … There are bits of video material. Not really programs and such but just snippets of commercials, and promotions and that sort of thing. But as I've got older I've kind of moved away from that sort of thing. I don't really record

> things that much now, it's mostly printed material… I was never really one to keep the programs

As Keating says, Pro-Am collectors are well aware that these elements of their collections don't meet official standards for importance:

> It's that sort of stuff you come across – it's not earth shattering, its not mind-blowing, but it's handy to have things like these and scripts…. two tickets to Larry K. Nixon's afternoon show, *Lady for a Day*. It's crappy stuff but it's you know kind of interesting…. Again, it's of no real practical import … but it's just nice to actually have

For most of the Pro-Am collectors there is a clear sense that their version of Australian television is a supplementary one. Importantly, it sits alongside official versions of Australian television history; it does not seek to replace them.

'We don't revere it like other countries revere theirs'

Interestingly, for many of the interviewees the discourse of supplementarity takes on a distinctly national flavour. It was common to say that they had to collect Australian television history because nobody else was preserving our national television generally. All Australian television – not just despised genres, or memorabilia – suffers from a lack of attention. As Keating puts it:

> There were already millions of people throughout the world collecting information and memorabilia on overseas programmes. There was hardly anyone doing Australian stuff. You can walk into a book store and there will be row upon row of books on American TV shows, *Adam-12*, *Dragnet*, *Ally McBeal*, you name an American or British TV show, there is probably a book on it somewhere. There is nothing on Australian shows at all, just nothing. And I thought, well, my viewpoint is someone has to collect this information

For Bayley:

> I started up [the website] because there was hardly anything about Australian television. There was a lot about American television, and a lot about English, but very little about Australian. At the time it was very rare

As Giles puts it, 'Australian television is being overlooked somewhat, the history of it. We don't revere it like other countries' revere theirs. And I don't know why, I think it's worth it'. Some of the interviewees argue that broadcasters contribute to this problem. One argued that:

> One definite thing about Australian TV is that it's more disposed of and forgotten. I mean you don't have endless repeats of Australian shows made in the 1960s, but you do have endless repeats of American shows made in the 1960s

Mercado expands on this point, noting that:

> all of these new channels keep springing up - every day you turn around there is another TV channel but all they screen is American reality shows and old American sitcoms. I mean look at it, they're repeating *The Flintstones* and *Bewitched* in prime time on Go! Now, Go! could be screening episodes of *The Young Doctors*. They've got 1,396 half hours … But when you tell them that they've got *The Young Doctors* they say, no, that wouldn't appeal to the target demographic of Go! But *The Flintstones* does apparently, and *The Flintstones* was made a decade before *The Young Doctors* … there are a bunch of shows out there that could be legally replayed on Australian TV to this day. And they may not set the world on fire with ratings but why not, amongst a sea of American repeats, stick a couple of Aussie classics?

In this context the Pro-Am's explain their own decisions at least partly as a defence of an Australian television history that is otherwise ignored. One interviewee comes across both American and Australian programming in his research, explains that he privileges the preservation of Australian material because:

> the priority goes to material that's unlikely to be kept anywhere else or that is endangered … when you look at American material, you find that it's pretty well preserved … When you look at the equivalent in Australian stuff though – often no one's heard of the programs, or very little exists so that's why the priority is those

One thing that unites these Pro-Am collectors is a shared discourse of supplementarity. They see Australian television history as something that is not

sufficiently well archived by professional institutions. For this reason it becomes their job to do something about it.

'I guess ours is a hybrid of TV'

Another common discourse across the interviews was a sense that Australian television draws on both American and British television – but it has a distinct character that comes from being more 'rough' than either of those.

When asked what is distinctive about Australian television Pro-Am collectors gave a number of answers. Some started by noting that Australian television drew extensively on overseas television – not just in terms of importing programs, but also producing local versions of overseas formats. Walters suggests that:

> In one sense we did go down the line of standard British and American television … a lot of our game shows were copies of American game shows like *Wheel of Fortune, The Match Game* … We even had our own version of *Jeopardy*

Nevertheless, most interviewees argued that Australian television does have a distinctive character. Some focused on the presence of local culture. Giles mentions local stars who are known to be Australian:

> What I love about Australian television – what I loved about it – is you could watch something, and there's Rowena Wallace, or there's Elaine Lee, … Cornelia Frances pops up in everything. As a kid I loved that, seeing these people in different roles.

Hammon talks about Australian geography appearing on music television:

> Greg Macainsh … I could relate to all his songs, Balwyn calling – my first girlfriend was from North Balwyn, I said, unbelievable, just songs about suburbs in Australia

Mercado extends this argument of borrowing to argue that Australian television has a distinctive aesthetic based on a mixture of British and American systems:

> I guess ours is a hybrid of TV. We have a unique TV situation. When we got TV from 1956, through the'50s and '60s we were exposed obviously to a lot of

> American TV, but we were also exposed to a lot of British TV throughout ties with the Commonwealth. And from that we kind of created our own hybrid of television. I think we took out more of the British sense of humour and I think that we were kind of probably a bit steeped in vaudeville and a little bit of innuendo from the English shows there in the early days of TV. From the American side of TV - I guess it's more what we didn't take from them. American TV is very … aspirational is the wrong word, but in American TV everything is very sort of perfect … They don't really do middle-class, working class, terribly well. I think in Australia we do do that. … Shows about ostentatious, wealthy people have never really worked in Australia. We tried to copy the *Dynastys* and the *Dallases* in the 80s, and Australians weren't interested in seeing those shows….

For Mercado this is combined with a visual aspect that is linked, as for Hammon, to the geography of the country:

> What we take for granted is seen particularly in the UK, it's like, wow, it's always summer. And for me, that's been going on in Australian TV since the early 70s. You dress all your characters as if it's summer all year around. And now you have shows like *Home and Away* that are set by the beach and so of course that's enormously visually appealing to an oversees audience that here in Australia we live under this bright sunshine and it's summer all year around, but it's also the fact that we do have a very unique light down here in Australia and that does come up extraordinarily well on film and television. So our television looks great and we have houses with big backyards that we take for granted

The most common argument, presented by several Pro-Am archivists, was that Australian television was distinctive because of the roughness of its production. One notes that:

> the programs that I'm concentrating on [soap operas]; these were I think, produced at a faster rate than American or UK primetime television. So it's a bit more rushed, I mean there's a little bit more 'this seems like a good story line, let's just go with it' because they're rushing more, so it's a bit more haphazard. It can be a little bit more fun I guess for the same reason. I think also it was

> created in a naïve environment so, they'd get away with things I guess that other nations may not get away with in terms of censorship, perhaps?

Giles notes that 'the problem in Australia is the population – it's too small'; and thus, as Keating says, in 'American [television] there is a lot more money goes into making the programmes usually so there's much better quality for starters'. It is interesting to note that it is primarily with regard to American television that Australian television is defined in these terms, more so than in relation to British television: as Bayley notes: 'the Americans are a little bit more polished in what they do, yet our industry started off very basic'. Keating explicitly suggests that 'with British [television], it's pretty much the same' as Australian. This is a familiar discourse in both Australia and Britain – defining the distinctiveness of their television production in opposition to 'flashy' American programs (McKee 2001).

Two interviewees did suggest that this situation was changing, and Australian television was becoming slicker. Giles argues that:

> I don't think television in Australia is as adventurous as it used to be. *Number 96* was almost 40 years ago, and they were doing things then that they don't do now – interracial things, gay issues, all sorts of stuff, nudity. Now you're getting five different cop shows

Hardman makes a similar point in relation to cop shows. He argues that Austrlaian programs in this genre 'used to be different' from British and American programs:

> not so much these days because … most of the cop shows that are produced now are kind of shot in a style they shoot there … the dialogue's much the same, they've got to have a good looking cast - whereas in the old days, the rough old days of television, you know, looks didn't matter, as long as the person looked the part, as long as Len Teale looked like a detective or Les Dayman looked like a homicide cop, that was fine…. [in] the old days of television it was pretty rough

The Pro-Am archivists were well aware of the international influences on Australian television – a perspective informed by their collecting and their knowledge of old television programs. But they were also able to articulate discourses of Australianness that were distinctive in the television system. These were often linked to a lack of 'polish' that was set up in direct opposition to American television, while also

emphasising the opportunities – for 'fun' and for experimentation – that this lack of a professional system offered.

'America did use the idea of Number 96 for a soap opera of their own'

One final point is of interest both for addressing the national character of Australian television, and for exploring the limits of Pro-Am histories of Australian television. In analysing the texts of these interviews with eleven Pro-Am collectors, one program stands out – *Number 96*. As noted above, Nigel Giles explains his own passion for collecting Australian television in terms of his childhood adherence to this show. Several other interviewees discuss the show at length, making the move from personal passion to claims of objective worth. The program was mentioned by several Pro-Am collectors as something distinctively Australian, which could never have been done in either the UK or the US. Mercado suggests that:

> You've got to look at the fact that when *Number 96* has been the first TV show in the world to a do a sympathetic portrayal of a normal homosexual character that isn't a pervert or a tragic limp wristed caricature. While they're doing that which is years ahead of the rest of the world, America is making *The Brady Bunch*, as David Sale, the creator of *Number 96* loves to point out and the UK is making *Coronation Street*

One interview suggests that: 'I think slipping in the nude scenes and the gay and lesbian characters I think they got away with it because Australia was a bit of a naïve country I suppose'. And Walters argues that this is one of the areas in which other countries learned from Australia:

> overseas countries also got ideas from our programs – like *Number 96* for example … America did use the idea of *Number 96* for a soap opera of their own … so there's a bit of borrowing from countries and vice versa.

Mercado goes further, claiming an extensive influence for the soap opera in the programming system not only of Australia, but also of the UK. *Number 96*, he claims:

> actually creates a model that ends up being replicated years and years later. And make no mistake, when Reg Grundy goes into television and starts making his own drama, of which the first one is the *Class of '74*, they sit down and

> study *Number 96* and probably time the scenes as they go to each commercial break and figure out the way to do it. Actually when they found out that Channel 10 wanted the show for five nights a week instead of just two nights a week, which was the way it was originally ordered, Don Cash and Bill Harmon go, how the hell are we going to do that, and actually make up a white board and sit there and make up a formula, so like, oh, well, okay, maybe if we film all the episodes in this flat on this day and then at the end of the week we could splice it all up and put it together.

Indeed, Mercado claims that the Australian production company Grundy's has had an international impact on television formats:

> So they create a formula that eventually gets taken up by the UK ... And they're only making two half hours a week – and they only up that ante when they start buying *Neighbours* in the mid-80s and *Neighbours* becomes this huge success and suddenly they are going, oh, five nights a week. And of course then you get *Coronation Street* five nights a week and *EastEnders* is making whatever they do four half hours a week. They may never have done that if the Australian soaps hadn't come in and just gone, come on guys, pick up your act, pick up the pace, you can give the viewers this every night of the week. So, yeah, creating that model is an incredible moment too.

The frequent allusions to *Number 96* raise an important question about the relationships between personal passions and the bigger picture. Why does *Number 96* appear with such regularity in Pro-Am accounts of Australian television history? Of course, a series of eleven interviews with Pro-Am collectors cannot claim in any way to be representative, and this may simply represent a sampling error that has resulted in an unrepresentative view of Pro-Am archivists in general. But given that the program does occur frequently in these interviews, how should we view that fact. Is it a necessary corrective to the bias in other histories towards current affairs and 'quality' programming (McKee 2001)? Or is this rather a failing of the Pro-Am archive, focussing on a program that, as Keating puts it, had a 'disastrous effect … on the production of series drama – woeful production values, sensationalist story-lines, etc'?

Conclusion

Pro-Am archivists play an important part in the preservation of Australian television history. A key element of their work is that they collect material that is not typically archived by professional organisations – despised genres such as soap operas, interstitial material like commercials and station idents, and memorabilia. There is a strong element of personal investment in their work – unsurprisingly, as they are doing it for love and not for payment. They collect things that interest them. But this does not mean that their practice is entirely solipsistic. In articulating the importance of the material they collect they are able to articulate it to wider histories of Australian television and the 'bigger scheme of things'. In particular, they understand Australian television history in two ways. Firstly they see it as being undervalued – a despised television history which professional archivists and historians do not consider as they should. And secondly they see it as being rough, unpolished – and valuable for that very reason.

Speaking about his own Pro-Am collecting tendencies Andrew Mercado remembers his mother's concern at his childhood obsessions:

> it was seen as quite a worrying event, you know. And my mother had a huge problem with it that this was going to create a kind of pattern for future life, you know, and no one could see that you could possibly get anything positive out of that. It was seen as a negative that you might become sort of a lonely – lonely old person in the future obsessively gluing things into scrapbooks

We can now see that Mercado's fascination should not have been perceived as worrying. Indeed, it worked out very positively for him and for anybody who is interested in the history of Australian television. By collecting and preserving those genres and programs that professional institutions have failed to archive, they ensure that our memory of Australian television is more vivid and more rounded than it would otherwise be.

Videos of the interviews with the Pro-Am collectors (apart from those who wanted to remain anonymous) are available on the TVLandAustralia website: http://www.tvlandaustralia.com/uploadmemories/

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[1] *Sons and Daughters* was a long-running Australian soap opera. *Skippy* was a children's show featuring a kangaroo. Graham Kennedy was a television presenter and host of variety programs from the 1950s until the 1980s and was known as the 'king of television' in Australia. Bert Newton hosted variety programs with Kennedy and went on to become light entertainment royalty, along with his wife Patti. Bert's career has spanned seven decades and he remains a familiar television presence in Australia.